

26 Aug 2020

Diversity and inclusion in market systems programming



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All blogs

Diversity and inclusion is an integral part of working in market systems and navigating complexity

Anoushka Boodhna: "In this blog series, we examine the ways in which the concepts of diversity and inclusion apply to market systems programming. We hold that diversity in complex adaptive systems is one sign of a healthy market system. To this end, embedding these principles in programming will contribute to successful market systems activities whose results will ultimately be more sustainable in the long run."

Devi Ramkissoon: "The concepts of diversity and inclusion are increasingly becoming integrated into workforce management across the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Key components of diversity include race, socioeconomic status, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, ability, and other affinities relating to culture, beliefs, and other aspects of identity. Inclusion often indicates the sustained engagement and integration of diversity into an organization's ethos. Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) are now seen as a crucial aspect of increasing productivity for organizations, no matter what their goal."^[1]

Diversity is an important characteristic of a healthy market system. In particular, there are three 'capacities' in market systems that are bolstered or enhanced as a system becomes more diverse:

1. Inclusivity

In MSD, inclusivity is the value market actors place on underserved

populations. In market systems that are more inclusive, firms tend to see underserved populations as a great opportunity for business growth; and in such systems, we find that market actors will adapt their marketing, supply chain, or management strategies to meet the needs of different market segments. As a result, inclusive growth requires increasing variation (i.e. diversity) in how the market works.

2. Innovation

In market systems, a diversity of ideas and perspectives encourages innovation. Diversity for innovation is closely tied to navigating complexity since the greater the diversity, the greater the likelihood of innovation (new ideas, new ways of working, adaptations, re-combinations) in response to changing signals.

3. Resilience

In market systems, resilience is the ability of a market system to respond to disturbances (such as shocks and stresses) in a way that allows consistency, sustainability, or an improvement in the market system's functioning. In this context, diversity - and diversification - is a central component of resilience. As a result, the more diverse a system, the more resilient it is.

Within international development programming, diversity and inclusion is an integral part of working in market systems and navigating complexity.

In our experience, a diverse and inclusive team is more likely to bring about the variation needed to catalyze market system changes through individual and social differences in perspectives, viewpoints, and ideas. When aligned around core principles such as poverty alleviation, such teams are better able to support market actors to explore different pathways for business growth and inclusion, as well as generate innovation where needed.

A diverse and inclusive team is also more likely to support market actors to navigate risk in constantly changing environments by thinking 'out-of-the-box' when observing signals, making adaptations, and finding creative ways to solve problems.
[2]

From program design through to implementation, learning, adaptive management and monitoring and evaluation, diversity in staffing and perspectives can be invaluable to the market system change.

For example, by cultivating an inclusive, diverse team and hiring staff with diverse backgrounds, the DfID-funded Kenya Market Assistance Programme was able to advance its goals. Specifically, the program hired a marketing expert to support inputs distribution strategies for smallholder farmers. Not only did she fit a diversity profile as a young Kenyan woman, she also was from the private sector and introduced new cross-cutting interventions in ICT and media, which became a new

space in MSD and agriculture. She also linked the program to a young, creative, tech start-up scene in Nairobi. This is just one of the ways that programming responds positively to applying diversity and inclusion concepts to MSD.

This blog originally appeared on [The Market Systems Development Hub](#) (MSD Hub) blog and [Marketlinks](#). It was co-authored by Anoushka Boodhna, Independent Consultant, and Devi Ramkissoon, Market Systems Specialist, USAID. It is the first in a series to be cross-posted on BEAM.

[1] Scientific American, How Diversity Makes Us Smarter: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/>

[2] McKinsey & Company, Delivering on Diversity: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/delivering-through-diversity>

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